



THE CONCEPT OF "COMING OUT" OR SELF-DISCLOSURE OF LGBTQ IN WESTERN COUNTRIES, AND ITS IMPACT ON THE INDIAN COMMUNITY

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ABSTRACT

Coming out is the process of accepting one's sexual orientation or gender identity and sharing it openly with other people. It's like a ritual for Westerners to come out after reaching puberty. When someone is ready to come out, their family, friends, and peer group support them. In some states, it is also considered a celebration. The mindset and attitude of people towards LGBTQIA are Different based on Education, Culture, attitudes of people, etc. It is a phenomenon that is necessitated by the prevalence of societal heteronormativity with the recent legal decriminalization of consensual same-sex sexual relationships in India, there is renewed interest in and emergent necessity to expand upon the existing academic discourse on the lives, rights, health, and well-being of same-sex attracted individuals in India.

This article focus on the importance of coming out or self-disclosure of gender orientation of LGBTQIA in India. India is the most populated nation in the world but the acceptance of the LGBTQIA community is still a hard topic from the mindset of parents and society. The Western culture is very much impacted on the Indian community so the coming out of LGBTQIA can be more complicated for teens who depend on parents or other adults for care and well-being in India. In this paper, The author tries to indicate the impact of Western culture on gender disclosure in India.

KEYWORDS: LGBTQ, Coming Out, India, Culture, Acceptance

INTRODUCTION

Is it considered an offense to deviate from the norm? Our world is characterized by a rich diversity of elements, yet within the human race, it has traditionally been divided into just two categories: male and female. The understanding that an individual's gender is not solely determined by biological characteristics but also by their sexual orientation is a relatively recent development. Unfortunately, people globally encounter violence, inequality, and at times, extreme mistreatment, including torture and execution, based on their love interests, appearance, or personal identity. Both sexual orientation and gender identity are intrinsic aspects of individuals and should never be grounds for discrimination or mistreatment. Human Rights Watch actively advocates for the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals, collaborating with activists who represent diverse identities and address various issues. Regrettably, being different from the majority can, in certain situations, be treated as a criminal act. This explains the observed increase in crimes against the LGBTQ community.

Lgbtq in Western Countries

LGBTQ rights vary significantly across European countries. Nineteen out of the 32 globally legalized same-sex marriage nations are in Europe, with an additional eleven legalizing civil unions or limited recognition for same-sex couples. However, several European countries, such as Armenia, Belarus, Bulgaria, Croatia, Georgia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Montenegro, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia, and Ukraine, do not recognize any form of same-sex unions. Notably, Croatia,

Hungary, and Montenegro recognize same-sex partnerships, while Armenia acknowledges same-sex marriages performed abroad. Eastern Europe is generally considered to have fewer legal protections, worse living conditions, and less supportive public opinion for the LGBT community than Western Europe.

All European countries allowing marriage also permit joint adoption by same-sex couples. Among countries with civil unions, only Andorra allows joint adoption, and half permits step-parent adoption.

In Africa, LGBTQ rights are generally limited compared to the United States, Canada, Western Europe, Australia, and New Zealand. Out of the 54 states recognized by the United Nations or African Union, the International Gay and Lesbian Association reported in 2015 that homosexuality is outlawed in 34 African countries. However, Benin, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Madagascar, Mali, Niger, and Rwanda have never criminalized homosexuality. Angola, Botswana, Cape Verde, Gabon, Guinea-Bissau, Lesotho, Mozambique, São Tomé and Príncipe, Seychelles, and South Africa have decriminalized homosexuality, with South Africa being the fifth country globally to legalize same-sex marriage in November 2006. Seven African countries, including Angola, Botswana, Cape Verde, Mauritius, Mozambique, Seychelles, and South Africa, have anti-discrimination laws for the LGBTQ community.

Since 2011, certain developed countries have considered or

enacted laws limiting or prohibiting general budget support to countries restricting LGBTQ rights. Despite this, many African nations have resisted enhancing LGBTQ rights, and some have even proposed laws to intensify sanctions against the LGBTQ community. Former African leaders like Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe and Uganda's Yoweri Museveni claimed that LGBTQ behavior was introduced to the continent from other parts of the world. However, scholarly research indicates that homosexuality has been part of various African cultures for an extended period.

Families acceptance of LGBTQ Member in Western countries

Understanding the acceptance and rejection of LGBTI individuals is crucial for comprehending the violence, discrimination, and various negative consequences stemming from exclusion and unfair treatment. Across the globe, sexual and gender minorities face significant impacts based on the attitudes and beliefs of those around them. Insufficient acceptance correlates with bullying, violence, physical and mental health issues, employment discrimination, and a lack of representation in civic leadership roles. Moreover, exclusion can lead to decreased workforce productivity and business profits.

A majority of sexual minority youth are born to heterosexual parents, who may harbor implicit or explicit negative attitudes towards homosexuality, expecting their children to be heterosexual. Similarly, transgender and/or gender nonconforming youth, born to cisgender and/or gender-conforming parents, often face negative attitudes toward deviations from societal expectations for gender identity, expression, and roles. Parental responses to LGBT youth can range from anxious concerns to abuse or banishment from the home.

Parental reactions to a child's sexual orientation or gender-related identity, differing from expectations, are linked to the child's attachment. Securely attached youth have parents who encourage exploration, value the child as an individual, and, while initially surprised or concerned, tend to work through negative attitudes over time. Insecurely attached youth, with inaccessible and potentially abusive parents, may experience less support or outright rejection. The latter can manifest as abuse, the youth running away, or eviction from the home.

The disclosure of sexual orientation within families may be influenced by the family system's values. A study exploring traditional values and family acceptance of sexual minorities revealed that families strongly emphasizing traditional values, such as the importance of religion, marriage, and having children, were perceived as less accepting of sexual minority orientations compared to less traditional families. Parental reactions to a youth's disclosure of sexual minority orientation may also vary based on race/ethnicity or cultural acceptance levels of sexual minorities. However, only one study, to our knowledge, has investigated parental responses to youths' sexual orientation disclosure across different racial/ethnic backgrounds, specifically among young adult gay males of

African-American, European-American, Mexican-American, and Vietnamese-American backgrounds. This study found similar family responses across the four groups.

LGBTQ in India

The Supreme Court, in a unanimous decision, invalidated a colonial-era prohibition on homosexual relations. This pivotal moment in LGBT rights not only overturned a relic of British oppression but also mandated that LGBT individuals in India receive all constitutional protections. While this was a significant triumph, it doesn't automatically ensure full freedom or equal standing for LGBT people in India. It highlights the ongoing challenges and emphasizes the global need to overturn outdated and repressive anti-LGBT laws.

To clarify, criminalizing same-sex relations essentially criminalizes being LGBT.

What sets the Indian court's decision apart is that it not only utilized a universal human rights standard to decriminalize homosexuality but also recognized the state's responsibility in eliminating the stigma associated with being LGBT. The court could have taken a step further by stressing that the Indian government should establish mechanisms for the reconciliation of estranged LGBT children and their parents. This could help eradicate the practice of parents compelling their LGBT children into arranged marriages, a situation that often leads to trauma and other mental health issues. Additionally, it could address the disturbing practice of "corrective rape," where families subject their LGBT children to nonconsensual sexual acts.

Justice Indu Malhotra, in her judgment, stated, "History owes an apology to the members of this community and their families, for the delay in providing redressal for the ignominy and ostracism that they have suffered through the centuries." However, there is a question about whether these rights encompass the freedom to marry or divorce. To achieve genuine equality, these rights must be expressly and entirely granted to the LGBT community.

India also faces the task of facilitating the reconciliation of LGBT individuals with their respective religious communities. Following the court's decision, numerous conservative leaders from Christian, Muslim, and Hindu communities, often in disagreement, criticized the ruling as shameful and vowed to challenge it. Such reconciliation would correct a historical injustice. Notably, it was British colonialists, not local religious leaders, who introduced these oppressive laws to India. Hinduism, the predominant religion in India, was historically accepting of the LGBT community before the British implemented Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code in the 1860s, imposing severe penalties for "carnal intercourse against the order of nature." This provision was later extended from India throughout the British Empire, contributing to the persisting hostility towards same-sex love in many former British colonies.

Over the last decade, there has been an increasing level of tolerance and acceptance towards the LGBT community in India, particularly in major cities. However, a significant number of LGBT individuals in the country continue to conceal their sexual orientation, fearing discrimination, particularly from families that may view homosexuality as shameful. Discrimination persists in rural areas, leading to familial rejection and coerced opposite-sex marriages for many LGBT individuals.

The fight for equal rights and acceptance is ongoing within the LGBT community in India, with transgender individuals facing notable challenges in gaining acceptance. Unfortunately, societal prejudice continues to stigmatize the LGBT community, posing a significant issue. Despite increasing acceptance among Indian youth, struggles persist within familial, home, and school environments for LGBT individuals. Instances of individuals coming out to their families and defying expected norms are not uncommon.

It's crucial to recognize that being lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender is not a problem or a choice. LGBT individuals simply have sexual preferences that deviate from the perceived norm, influenced by learned behaviors and personal perspectives. Asserting that it is objectively wrong for people to have different sexual preferences is, in itself, an erroneous perspective.

Referring to Article 15 of the Indian Constitution, which prohibits discrimination based on various grounds, including sex, it is emphasized that if heterosexual individuals have the right to live in society with respect, the same should apply to LGBT individuals. The argument extends beyond religious considerations, highlighting the importance of humanity. In Hinduism, for instance, the historical acceptance of hijras by Lord Rama is noted, signifying the significance of recognizing the rights of the LGBT community in society.

Families acceptance of LGBTQ Member in India

Today, homosexuality and queer identities may be acceptable to more Indian youths than ever before, but within the boundaries of family, home, and school, acceptance of their sexuality and freedom to openly express their gender choices remain a constant struggle for LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) people. In urban India, where social media and corporate initiatives have created increasing awareness of LGBT rights, the scenario looks more upbeat for gay men than for transgender people or lesbian women. While urban LGBT voices that are heard through several online and real-world platforms form an important part of LGBT activism, these expose only a small part of the diverse challenges faced by the community.

Far away from gay pride parades, meet-ups, and heated discussions on Twitter, families in rural India have their ways of dealing with LGBT individuals. In some parts, secret honor killings are planned so that the only way for a young gay man to survive is to run away under the cover of the night to some city, with no money or social support. In other parts, lesbian women

are subjected to family-sanctioned corrective rapes, which are often perpetrated by their family members.

The Concept of Coming Out or Self-Disclosure

Coming out is a journey of self-discovery, acceptance, and acknowledgment of one's sexual orientation or identity. This process entails both self-exploration and the sharing of one's identity with others. Coming out can unfold gradually or happen abruptly, often beginning with an individual's internal acknowledgment that their long-held feelings align with being gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or queer.

The coming-out process can be highly challenging due to societal norms dictating behaviors related to sexual orientation and gender identity. Many individuals grow up receiving the message that conformity to heterosexual norms is expected, and any deviation may lead to feelings of being different or not fitting into expected roles within family, friends, workplace, or society at large. Facing societal reactions and attitudes toward LGBTQ individuals during the coming-out process can evoke emotions of shame, isolation, and fear.

Despite the difficulties, self-disclosure can also be a liberating and empowering experience. It offers a sense of authenticity and the opportunity to connect with a supportive community of like-minded individuals. Although the prospect of coming out to others may be daunting, the rewards often outweigh the challenges associated with the process.

The pace of individuals moving through the coming-out process varies, as it is a profoundly personal journey. People navigate this process in diverse ways and at different stages of life. Some individuals may recognize their sexual identity early on, while others arrive at this understanding after many years. Coming out is an ongoing, sometimes lifelong, process.

Upon acknowledging one's identity as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer, the decision to disclose this information to others or remain "in the closet" is entirely personal. Only the individual can determine when and how it feels safe to come out. Some may choose to be open about their identity in certain aspects of their life while keeping it private in others—such as being out to their families but not at work or vice versa. Six Stages to Coming Out

The consequences of coming out

A recent investigation revealed that a significant factor contributing to the societal stigmatization of LGBT individuals is the way parents react to homosexuality. The study suggests that the acceptance of most LGBT individuals by their families is contingent upon their willingness to conform to heterosexual norms.

In a society heavily influenced by stringent social and cultural norms dictating parameters for education, career, and marriage, the absence of familial support can have profound implications for the mental and physical well-being of LGBT individuals. The combination of isolation and societal pressure to conform

often results in conditions such as depression, suicidal thoughts, and psychosomatic illnesses. Faced with these challenges, many opt to relocate to different cities to escape the intense expectations regarding marriage and family initiation.

Families accepting the identities of LGBT individuals often impose various restrictions on their manner of dress and interactions with partners. In the absence of family support, online communities and social media serve as accessible alternatives, providing spaces for LGBT people to connect and collaborate, with platforms like Gaysi, Gaylaxy, and publishers like Queer Ink playing crucial roles.

While theoretically, a majority of educated individuals express support for alternative sexualities and gender identities, there is a pressing need to transform this support into tangible changes in daily behavior. Closing the gap between academic knowledge and real-life experiences requires individuals to challenge stereotypes actively. For instance, the prevalent practice of sharing homophobic jokes needs to be questioned, prompting allies to highlight the detrimental impact such behavior has on freedom and dignity. Establishing a critical mass of awareness within society is a crucial aspect of on-campus activism.

How the Acceptance of LGBTQ in Foreign countries Influence India

Initially, it's essential to acknowledge that homosexuality was present in Ancient India, forming an integral part of the country's history. Evidence of this can be found in Hindu temples, where depictions of same-sex individuals embracing or engaging in explicit gestures exist. Additionally, references to homosexuality are present in religious texts, including Sanskrit sources like Manusmriti, Shikhandi, and a chapter of Vatsyayana's Kamasutra.

However, despite the awareness of these practices, societal acceptance was minimal, and such behaviors were generally frowned upon. Historical accounts, such as an article in India Today, describe the punishments meted out to individuals accused of homosexuality. For women, this could involve shaving their hair and cutting off two fingers, while men engaging in same-sex relations risked losing their caste. Homosexuality is also discussed in various sections of the aforementioned Kamasutra.

Additionally, in the Mahabharata, one of the prominent Sanskrit epics of ancient India, often translated as "the great tale of the Bhārata," where Bhārata symbolizes dharma, encompassing behaviors that give life meaning and align with a certain idealism.

During this historical period, homosexuality not only existed but was subject to punishment, including torture and inevitable social consequences. While it was acknowledged, acceptance was limited, and it was not actively encouraged.

However, it is revealed that the perception of homosexuality as a crime gained prominence during the modern era, particularly with the arrival of British colonists in India. The pivotal

development was the introduction of Section 377 in the Indian Penal Code in 1861, criminalizing sexual activities "against the order of nature," encompassing homosexuality, intercourse with minors, or non-consensual sexual activities.

Does legalization helps equal acceptance?

Homosexuality was initially decriminalized in 2009 by the Indian Supreme Court, which struck down Section 377, a colonial-era law criminalizing same-sex intercourse imposed by British colonists. However, in 2013, the Supreme Court reversed this decision, recriminalizing homosexuality. Fortunately, in September of a subsequent year, the Supreme Court revisited its stance, legalizing homosexuality once more and affirming that discrimination based on sexual orientation violates fundamental rights—a significant victory.

Upon closer examination, the legality or illegality of homosexuality doesn't necessarily translate into widespread acceptance, especially in familial or social circles. Numerous personal accounts highlight that, even after the legalization, individuals in rural villages continue to face discrimination and assaults, indicating that legal changes often don't significantly impact the lived experiences of people in these areas.

The legalization of homosexuality, a cause for celebration in India and globally, has predominantly resonated with urban populations, where the revelry is more pronounced due to larger numbers participating in the festivities. Despite the acknowledgment of the "third sex," the complete acceptance of trans individuals remains elusive, and many endure contemporary forms of mistreatment.

For example, trans people, even those with severe illnesses, sometimes face refusal of medical treatment due to unwarranted fears of contagion held by some doctors. A particularly distressing scenario involves trans individuals with HIV, who grapple not only with the stigma surrounding the virus, still a taboo in India but also with discrimination based on their gender identity, which may not align with their outward appearance. This situation is especially poignant considering that the hijra community, with roots in ancient Indian history, is not accorded full recognition as an integral part of Indian society.

India's cultural landscape has been significantly shaped by foreign influences, evident in attire, cuisine, and habits. While the legalization of homosexuality marks an initial step toward acceptance, the journey toward genuine and widespread acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community in India is far from complete. Despite optimistic articles and essays suggesting progress, the day-to-day reality may present disparities. Indians appear to be gradually moving toward embracing the self-disclosure of gender orientation by LGBTQ people, with changing perspectives influenced by developments in Western countries.

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